

Today, Rep. Stark (D-CA) introduced a joint House Resolution calling for a White House conference to address quality of care in assisted living facilities (ALFs).

“Although assisted living is a popular and fast-growing long-term care option, there has been no focused national attention to quality of care in this industry,” Rep. Stark said. “Right now, regulation and oversight varies dramatically from state to state. It is time for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and consumers to join together to develop long overdue national quality standards,” he continued.

The number of Americans living in ALFs may double in the next 20 years and ALFs increasingly receive federal funding through Medicaid’s Home and Community-Based Services waiver. Unfortunately, in many states, industry expansion has not been accompanied by a tightening of quality standards or accountability measures. A 1999 General Accounting Office report found that 25% of surveyed facilities were cited for five or more quality of care violations between 1996-1997 and 11% were cited for 10 or more problems.

Rep. Stark pointed to a recent Wall Street Journal article (January 15, 2001) detailing how Sunrise Assisted Living, Inc. prospers by recruiting frail seniors who might otherwise be served in nursing homes. “How do they stay profitable?” asked Rep. Stark, “By accepting very sick or cognitively impaired elderly and collecting extra-care fees -- sometimes as high as \$1640/month on top of what residents already pay. Yet, a 90-bed Sunrise facility averages only one registered nurse on duty for 8-12 hours per day. Nursing homes of that same size average four to five nurses on duty at all times.”

“Some states simply do not have adequate standards or consumer protections in place and this can have deadly consequences,” stressed Rep. Stark. “One of my constituents recently died because ALF staff neglected to respond to her repeated calls for help. But this is not only a local issue – deaths in ALFs have been reported across the country due to abuse, negligence, or just plain incompetence.” He referred to the Wall Street Journal’s account of how staffing issues at a Sunrise facility in Georgia contributed to the critical injury of a visually-impaired resident and the death of his wife. Rep. Stark added, “What disturbs me as much as the incident itself, is that the state fined the facility a paltry \$3000.”

Rep Stark concluded, “I believe ALFs that receive federal funding should be required to meet reasonable, commonsense quality standards to protect residents. Frail, elderly ALF residents must be protected and sub-par facilities must face real consequences. I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to protect frail seniors in ALFs throughout our country.”

The Consortium for Consumers in Assisted Living is the only national organization focused exclusively on the rights and needs of assisted living consumers. It’s Board of Directors co-chair, Karen Love, wholeheartedly endorsed the resolution, “Your call for a White House conference to study quality of care issues and develop national recommendations is an important and timely measure towards ensuring consumer protections in assisted living facilities and to avoid another nursing home-type debacle.”